



Students' Perception on the English Language Learning Policy in Indonesia

Dwi Ratih Nolaputri ¹, Jalu Harsabawa ²

Master of English Education

Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto

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ABSTRACT

English is generally regarded as a foreign language in Indonesia. Therefore, the number of people who use English in their daily lives is still relatively small in this country. However, the policy makers have made English one of the main subjects to be taught at school in Indonesia's curriculum. English has also been included as one of the core subjects which are tested through the National Examination in Indonesia. This study aimed to find out the students' perception on (1) the importance of having English language skills, (2) the sufficiency of the English language material taught at school for their needs, and (3) the implementation of National Examination to test their English language skills. The data was collected through a questionnaire which was distributed to the students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, with a total of 297 respondents. The results show that the majority of the students believed that (1) it is important for them to have English language skills, (2) the English language material taught at school is sufficient for their needs, and (3) they approved of the implementation of the National Examination to test their English language skills.

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1. Introduction

The English Language has been seen as a good medium of communication in Indonesia. Apart from the fact that it has been adopted as a teaching language in higher institutions of learning, it is also being considered as an enhancement for social status. Communication skill in English can bring more opportunities for the citizens in national and international labor markets (Susanto, S., & Nanda, D. S. 2018). Other than communication, mastering English can also help us to access most information and knowledge from many platforms such as books, the internet, and televisions. Since many of the international networks of televisions and many new international printed books are starting to be accessible. However most of the new information and knowledge are published using the English language, due to that reason in order to get new information and new knowledge it is important for someone to at least be able to read in english. Knowing that, the government of Indonesia already made some decisions regarding the teaching of English language in the schools.

One of them was by making the English language become one of the subjects in the National examination. By doing so it will give English more spotlight in teaching and learning activities in schools, especially in junior and senior high school level. National examination is a part that can not be separated from national education; it is an elementary and middle standard evaluation system which is applied nationally and organized by the education evaluation system. Constitution about the national education system number 20 years 2003 stated that in order to control the quality of education nationally, due to that reason evaluation was done as the accountability form of education organizer to the related party (Hartanto.S, 2013). Some of the subjects are chosen to be tested in the national examination. The subjects are; Math, Indonesian Language, English language, Social and Science. Some of the subjects such as Social and Science are tested to the students according to their major either they chose Social or Science in the second year of senior high school, meanwhile in junior high school the two subjects are tested to all students in the national examination. The government of Indonesia has already made a good decision in making English language as one of the subjects in the national examination. By making that decision students will take more effort in learning English. Not only students, teachers also need to put more effort in teaching the subject so their students will get the knowledge needed in mastering English, especially enough for them in facing the national exam, and that was the plan. But does it really work that way? Is it really enough to only make such a plan? Do students really feel that the English learning in the school is enough for them? Do students really see national examinations as the “trigger” for them to put more effort in learning English? In the end there are still many questions lingering with the effectiveness of the governor's decision toward English language learning in schools.

The adoption of the English language by Indonesia has brought about a tremendous change in the educational policies of the country. Consequently, some pedagogy relating to English language teaching, namely, the methodology, curriculum, and evaluation has been given substantial attention so as to improve the competency of its usage in the country (Sitti Syamsinar M & Ahmad Johari, 2014). Developing a curriculum that clearly spells out how knowledge can be acquired through the various ways in teaching a learning activity is one of the right ways. However, to ensure that the appropriate knowledge is passed to learners there must be a way of assessing what is being taught in various schools and at various levels.

This study aimed to find the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the students' perception on the importance of having English language skills in Indonesia?
2. What is the students' perception on the sufficiency of the English language material taught at school according to the curriculum in Indonesia?

3. What is the students' perception on the implementation of National Examination in Indonesia to test their English language skills?

2. Related Study

In Indonesia, English became a compulsory subject in Schools throughout Indonesia in 1945 soon after the Indonesian independence day. English has been taught and used as a foreign language in Indonesia over sixty-five years (Marlina, 2012). Even Though Indonesia was not colonized by the British, the language has become a significant part of the nation's institutions. Due to the necessity in transacting business and communicating with neighbouring countries, making learning English is inevitable. The curriculum of English learning provided by the department of national education has been implemented from elementary to high schools. But, English as a learning subject remains an optional subject in elementary school. The learning process is divided into three grades in junior and senior high school with milestones in each for students to reach in each grade. Competence standards of teaching and speaking in junior and senior high school are done through oral expression of the meanings in each type of communication. It is achieved by using types of text in daily life context. The process of learning English is very challenging in Indonesia due to the emphasis of national language. The fear of making mistakes affected the rate of students' personal rate in producing language in the speaking class so much that not all students in english foreign language have the courage to speak.

There is still a scarce number of research about students' perspectives on the policy of education, especially that related to English learning. Although students' opinion toward the way they learn in schools can be one of the considerations that can be used in developing or improving the curriculum, since students also one of the importance factors in teaching and learning activity so it is natural for policy makers to consider what students need or feel about their current way of learning in school as the references for future development. Imroatus and Teguh (2019) also suggested students' involvement in the research which related to the curriculum, because a larger number of respondents with heterogeneous backgrounds are needed in research related with curriculum.

On the other hand, this kind of study was already done from the perspective of education experts. Most of the results show that the curriculum applied in Indonesia needs some adjustment. Lie (2002) explained that the teachers and EFL administrator are required to re-examined the curriculum from all aspects form within and outside to make it more responsive to multicultural experience. The current curriculum puts more pressure on teachers because of the overcrowded classroom. In other words, more teachers and more classrooms are needed to enhance teaching to be more effective, and the knowledge updating related to the curriculum also needed. Teacher retraining is needed on a regular basis so they can be familiar with the latest developments regarding the English language as part of the curriculum (Sitti Syamsinar M & Ahmad Johari, 2014).

3. Method

This study employed the quantitative method. The data was collected by distributing a questionnaire using Google Forms to the participants. The questionnaire was in the form of statements about their perception on the English language learning policy in Indonesia. Each statement was followed by four choices in a Likert scale. These four choices were "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", and "Strongly agree". The participants were asked to choose one of the four choices in the scale according to their own opinions about the statements.

The participants of this study were the students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto who were chosen randomly. University students were chosen for this study because they had experienced learning English at school before entering the university. Therefore, they were

expected to have insights about their previous experience in learning English at school with the curriculum in Indonesia.

There were a total of 297 respondents in this study. The research data was obtained from their answers to the questionnaire. The data was then analyzed and presented in this study to draw conclusions about the students' perception on the English language learning policy in Indonesia.

4. Results

4.1 The importance of having English language skills in Indonesia

The students were asked to assert their opinion on the statement "Having English language skills is important for me." by choosing "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", or "Strongly agree".

Table 1

"Having English language skills is important for me."

Opinion	Response (Number)	Response (Percentage)
Strongly Disagree	2	0.7%
Disagree	4	1.3%
Agree	81	27.3%
Strongly agree	210	70.7%

The results show that only a very small number of the total respondents (2%) had negative opinions about the importance of having English language skills. In other words, almost all of the respondents (98%) felt that learning English language skills is important for them.

4.2 The sufficiency of English language material taught at school according to the curriculum in Indonesia

The students were asked to assert their opinion on the statement "The English language material taught at school is already sufficient for my needs." by choosing "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", or "Strongly agree".

Table 2

"The English language material taught at school is already sufficient for my needs."

Opinion	Response (Number)	Response (Percentage)
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	38	12.8%
Agree	192	64.6%
Strongly agree	67	22.6%

Only 12.8% of the respondents asserted that they disagree with the statement, implying that they felt that the English language material taught at school had not met their needs. On the other hand, 87.2% of them claimed that the English language material taught at school was sufficient for their needs, as shown in how they chose either “Agree” or “Strongly agree” to the given statement.

4.3 The implementation of the National Examination in Indonesia to test students' English language skills

The students were asked to assert their opinion on the statement “I approve of the implementation of the National Examination in Indonesia to test my English language skills.” by choosing “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Agree”, or “Strongly agree”.

Table 3

“I approve of the implementation of the National Examination in Indonesia to test my English language skills.”

Opinion	Response (Number)	Response (Percentage)
Strongly Disagree	4	1.3%
Disagree	37	12.5%
Agree	175	58.9%
Strongly agree	81	27.3%

It can be seen from the results that only 13.8% of the respondents were against the implementation of the National Examination in Indonesia to test their English language skills. Meanwhile, 86.2% of them chose either “Agree” or “Strongly agree” to the given statement, showing their approval of the implementation of the National Examination.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

Even though the status of English in Indonesia is as a foreign language, almost all of the respondents felt the need to have English language skills. More than two thirds of them even strongly agreed that having English language skills is important for them. Therefore, it can be concluded that these respondents believed that they need to have English language skills to support some aspects of their lives, such as for academic or future career purposes, among others.

Regarding the English language teaching and learning curriculum in Indonesia, most of the respondents claimed that the English language material taught at school was sufficient for their needs. However, there were more than a tenth of them who felt that it was not adequate for them. It means that there is still something that the policy makers need to improve about the curriculum in Indonesia in order to satisfy these aforementioned respondents.

Lastly, the topic of whether the National Examination should be implemented has been a popular debate in Indonesia. The results of this study shows that the majority of the respondents showed their approval towards the implementation of the National Examination in Indonesia to test their English language skills. However, there were more than a tenth of the respondents who were against its implementation. Hopefully, these results can help the policy makers to evaluate this policy and decide whether they should continue implementing it in the future.

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